

ARUBA

Just off Venezuela's Caribbean coast, Aruba has not been a prime scuba-diving destination, but bring your gear since some operators, especially those catering to the Dutch, will take you to some pretty decent diving. ... Miles of white sand, glitzy casinos, and beaches cater to windsurfers. ... For the best deals look into gamblers' packages. ... There are several good boat dives. The South Wall, past San Nicholas near the southern tip of Aruba, is also good. ... Aruba lies south of the hurricane belt.

Aruba Fly'n Dive, Hyatt Regency Aruba, July 2003, Nancy Olah (nolah@earthlink.net), Fort Mill, SC. Vis: 20-25 ft. Experience: 115 dives. The country is very tourist oriented, restaurants are fabulous, resort properties are everywhere (not to mention casinos, clubs and shows.) It's just not a great island for diving. Viz was poor on every dive, and although the *Antiles*, *Jane C*, and *Pederanalis* were interesting wrecks, the poor viz really detracted from the dives. John Oster is friendly and engaging, but his boat is older, we had to carry tanks from the van to the boat, drinking water wasn't handled hygienically (people dipped their cups into a big cooler!), and the boat was always late (sometimes more than an hour) in getting back to the dock, which made it hard to hook up with nondivers in our party. The Grand Hyatt was gorgeous, on a beautiful,

wide, white sand beach. Can't say enough good things about restaurants, like the Flying Fishbone, d'Vittorio, La Dome, Cuva's Cooking, the Old Canuccu House, and many others. (www.searuba.com)

Mermaid Divers, May 2003, Richard Spink (rspink@bellsouth.net), Woodstock, GA. Experience: 51-100 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 feet. Water: 80 to 82 F, choppy, surge. We dove with Mermaid for three days (six dives), and one day they packed the boat with 16 divers. Not enough room to sit down, and we had to wait our turn to put on our equipment. Every slot for a tank was used (40 tanks were on the boat). They encouraged some of us to go up top with the captain to have more room on the boat. The dive master and boat captain (Tito) were nice and helpful. (www.scubadivers-aruba.com)

Unique Sports, La Quinta Beach Resort, July 2003, Stacy Dembitsky (ladydiver@sc.rr.com), Lexington, SC. Experience: 26-50 dives. Vis: 25 to 50 feet. Water: 79 to 83 F, choppy, surge, currents. The water was cold — 79 on a 60 ft dive for 40+ min gets a bit chilly. Made the divers bunch up, and lots of bumping ensued — can be a bit of a distraction. Dive leaders were good at finding interesting fish, but if I stopped to photo, lots of other divers did too, which ruined my shots. The staff were friendly and helpful. The dive leaders were professional and helpful with any problems during the dives — unfortunately, some dives were so fast, I thought I was in a race. It was a different type of diving — one

tank a.m., one tank p.m. — we are used to two tank a.m., and two tank p.m. When questioned about this, we were told that Aruba isn't a diving destination, but a golf and cruise stop. Therefore, they make accommodations for the people that want to make one dive, then some sightseeing before shopping and reboarding ship. We didn't get cruisers on our boats, but a lot of operators do, so be watchful. The boat didn't have a camera table; however, there was a cooler at the back of the boat supposedly for cameras, but lots of masks (along with the mask defogger) were in there also, so hold on to your own camera. Developing film on island is expensive, we brought ours home. This operator isn't really about photos, so it was about what we expected after having dove with operations that cater to photographers. (www.visitaruba.com/uniquesports, www.bestvaluetimeshares.com/laquinta.htm)

THE BAHAMAS

The Bahamas are easily accessible from Florida and excellent for long weekends, with pretty reefs (though many are affected by algae), decent tropicals, and plenty of resorts that feed sharks. ... Keep hurricane season, June through October, in mind; winter weather from December to March means mid-70s, chilly water, and sweaters in the evening; average nighttime temperature is in the mid-60s, but can drop into the 50s if winter air blows off the continent. ... Out-

island are resorts small and personal, but the best diving is now reached by live-aboards.

Abaco

Abaco Dive Adventures, Moorings Charter, May 2003, Gerald Canning, Reno, NV. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 75 to 200 feet. Water: 78 to 83 F, calm. A new operation this year. It specializes in small-size, adventure diving. We were the only two passengers on a six-pack boat. We ran the dive as a rendez-vous dive with our charter sailboat. We made arrangements with Abaco Dive Adventures by VHF radio, and they came and picked us up from our anchorage. Tim, the divemaster, was born in the islands and has been diving since he was 8 years old. He led us through some fantastic coral formations, tunnels, and schools of shiners so thick you couldn't see the person in front of you in the tunnels. We saw tarpon and Caribbean reef sharks. We were allowed to dive as long as we had air — and we recorded one 80 minute dive and two others that were longer than one hour. We had a great time. No specific facilities for UWP — however divemaster/boat crew took care of handing and retrieving the camera. (www.abacodiveadventures.com/abaco.asp, www.go-abacos.com/conchinn/moorings)

Brendal's Dive Shop, Green Turtle, August 2003, Alan & Barbara Fischl, Great Neck, NY. Although all of the sites were 50 or 60 feet, maximum, most were full of fish. We saw